



## ‘William Peppé's Petition to Lord Canning (1859): Self-Fashioning, Grievance, and the Literary Rhetoric of the Settler-Colonial Subject’

**Shaleen Kumar Singh**

Professor, Department of English,  
Swami Shukdevanand College, Shahjahanpur (UP), INDIA  
Email: [shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in](mailto:shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in)

### ABSTRACT

The petition of 22 June 1859 of William Peppy, now on the files of the Government of India of the Home Department, in Public Letter No. 105, and delivered to the Home Department on 16 September 1859, is an example of a most exquisite piece of rhetorical polish on the part of the non-official European landowners in the North-Western Provinces after the rising in 1857. Well past a simple demand of material compensation and reward, the letter is a carefully managed act of settler colonial virtue at which Peppé is casting himself in sharp contrast to salaried officials, mutinous sepoys, and opportunistic Natives who have come around to the eleventh hour. The petition has been analysed by the classical rhetorical quadrum; exordium, narratio, confirmatio and peroratio, with the structure of the letter being disciplined in that it switches between deferential address and the bitterness that is reluctantly voiced. Ethos is achieved in the exordium by calculated egotism of self-depreciation; the chronological narrative of the narratio elevates a personal landholder in a land of uniformity into an essential element of order, and the documentary evidence thus amassed together with simultaneous portrayal of rival Indian claimants as unworthy is capped by a triple declamation, - I have served your Government, I have served my country, and my Queen, - as a means of establishing the name of Peppy in the annals of imperial history. Systematic reframing can be seen through cross-reading the petition against the very letters of instruction that Wynyard had written (June–July 1857). Orders to cut them up at once and take no prisoners, to destroy Mahua Dabar so that not a single stone of it is left upon another, become, in the retrospective history of Peppé, the disciplined patriotic duty, instead of the extralegal frontier violence, which they truly were. The paper locates the petition against the particular military and political history of Gorakhpur Basti in 1857-59 and claims that this type of document can help illuminate the cultural situational position of non-official Europeans in colonial India as well as the literary conventions within colonial patronage that settler colonial actors attempt to establish themselves.

**Keywords:** Indian Rebellion of 1857 Colonial Rhetoric Settler Colonialism Petition Writing and Patronage Gorakhpur–Basti Colonial History

### INTRODUCTION

Author:- *Shaleen Kumar Singh*

Email:- [shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in](mailto:shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in)

Received:- 05 January, 2026

Accepted:- 21 March, 2026.

Available online:- 30 March, 2026

Published by JSSCES, Bareilly

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License

### Introduction: The Petition as Colonial Literary Genre

On 22 June 1859, William Peppé, estate manager and forest grantee at Birdpore in the Basti district of the North-Western Provinces, addressed a long letter to Charles, Viscount Canning, Governor-General and Viceroy of India. Peppé had spent much of 1857 and 1858 operating as



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

an honorary deputy magistrate in the volatile Gorakhpur–Basti region following the uprising that began at Meerut in May 1857. He had marched 200 tenants fifty miles to Gorakhpur at the Magistrate's request, burned the village of Mahua Dabar where British officers had been killed, rescued survivors from rebel custody, supplied rice to the Nepalese Goorkha brigades, fought a skirmish at Alidapur in which he was knocked from his horse and wounded, and watched his own estate house burned by rebels in May 1858. Now, two years after his first mobilisation, he remained unrewarded, and a promised lease of confiscated rebel villages at Tegra had been cancelled without explanation. His petition was a bid to force the Governor-General's personal attention to this neglect.

The letter is preserved—along with Wynyard's letters of instruction, a parallel claim by the Irish indigo-planter M. P. Dunne, and minutes by successive secretaries—in the Government of India's Home Department, Public Letter No. 105 of 1859, the case being formally placed before the Home Department's Public Consultation of 16 September 1859 (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). Although it has received very little academic attention, this document is one of the largest extant examples of the settler-colonial reward claim sub-genre. This current research is a literary artefact, a carefully crafted rhetorical object with all its inner arrangement, figurative language, judicious use of evidence, and emotional changing is a conscious decision and not incidental to the crisis, and portrays an artisan who pays a lot of attention to power dynamics in written communication.

Rhetorical construction of the petition corresponds to the traditional type of genre order exordium, narratio, confirmatio, and peroratio. Through following these classification, the analysis

does not use them as a cold-blooded taxonomy, but rather as interpretive prisms, which reveal the working functions of the text at every point, visible beyond its superficial content.

This question is defined by two methodological focuses in comparison to a traditional historical exegesis. To begin with, the missives of Wynyard to Peppé are not isolated, but contrasted with the petition itself, not published separately, but included in the four-volume collection, by S. A. A. Rizvi, under the title, *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh: Source-Material* (vol.4). There is the interstitial discourse between the operational diction of Wynyard and Peppé speak in retrospect; this is the focal literary datum of the present paper. Second, the petition is placed in the broader context of the reward claims of the post-1857, i.e., Indian taluqdars, loyal allies of the prince, and salaried officials, against which Peppie explicitly places himself; making the hierarchical rhetoric of the document intelligible as a controlled reaction to a certain competitive situation.

## II. Exordium: Establishing Ethos Through Deliberate Abasement

### The Paradox of Performed Humility

To classical rhetoric, exordium was required to gain the goodwill, attention, and receptivity of the audience benevolentium, attentionem, docilem, and usually achieved by humility, reasonableness, and indifference on the part of the speaker (Cicero 1.15.20). This is the manoeuvre that Peppé carries out in the first paragraph:

*"I humbly and respectfully beg leave to place the following representation before you, and crave your favorable consideration to my petition." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)*



The formula is conventional in colonial petitionary prose. Indian subjects addressing the Governor-General routinely began with professions of even more abject humility, and British civilians also adopted the register as a mark of propriety. But the phrase "private and humble individual"—which recurs, crucially, in the peroratio—does something specific: it pre-emptively defuses objections to the impertinence of directly addressing the Governor-General rather than proceeding through subordinate channels. By announcing his smallness, Peppé makes his boldness seem all the more remarkable.

The paradox of the exordium is that performed humility in this genre is simultaneously a claim to virtue. To announce that one is a "private and humble individual" who has nevertheless served is to imply that one's service is purer than that of careerist officers who might have had professional incentives. There is something approaching Calvinist pride in self-abasement here. Wynyard himself had recognised this quality when he wrote to Peppé on 23 June 1857: "Your presence with the Sowars has had the desired effect, enabling Col<sup>l</sup>., Mrs. and Misses Lennox ... to come forth from their places of refuge" (Rizvi 281)—an acknowledgement that a private citizen had succeeded where officers could not act. Peppé's exordium plays off the above precedent in a strategic manner, that is, at the beginning, it has been made clear that a low ranking can be coupled with an excellent performance of operations.

### Framing the Audience Relationship

The petition addresses his excellency the right honorable formally. Lord Canning, the Governor General and Viceroy of India." This is a formal address that is consequential in nature. The person who actually promulgated the Queen

Proclamation of 1858 that assured the subject loyalists of their rights and gave a commitment of fair treatment of service was Lord Canning. He had as well been a controversial figure due to his soft treatment of former Indian elites; in Britain a mocking label was bestowed on him, Clemency Canning. Accordingly, he was being increasingly pressed to generously compensate the Europeans, both civil and military, who had actively put down the rebellion. The point of addressing petition directly to Canning, and not to a middle-level authority of his own community, is that Peppé circumvents the intermediaries in administration, who have failed him and instead appeals to the personal judgment of an authority who has made an open declaration of recognising service. Therefore, the exordium has the two-fold role: it makes itself humble to the attention of any bureaucratic reader, and at the same time exalts Canning as the representative of the sole power that can override system failures. This step is not only daring, but as a paradox, quite traditional in the rhetorical tradition of colonial petitions.

### III. Narration: Plotting Service as a Campaign Chronicle

#### The Grammar of the Action Narrative

The narratio, or exposition of fact, in classical rhetoric takes up the biggest part of the petition, the first mobilisation of Peppé on 5 June 1857 to the end of his second service in September 1858. According to the classical handbooks, the narratio must be short, clear and believable (*brevis, lucida, verisimilis*), whereas the narrative of Peppé breaks the rules in the most noticeable manner. It is long, not brief, but it acquires a clarity with the help of the strict chronological form, each episode is preceded by a time marker: On the 5th of June, On the 15th of June, On the 20th of June, On the 3rd of



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

July, On the 12th of August, On the 19th of July, which lends the story the air of a regimental journal, or of the proceedings of a magistrate. This parody of official archival forms is very important; to use the pretensions of minute presentation, Peppé unconsciously claims that his narrative is as authoritative as any official communiqué and more veridimant, as it is free, not prescribed. The most important episodes, which serve a purpose in the narration, are as follows:

Episode 1 58 June 1857): Peppy is given the letter by Paterson, and within hours assembles 200 men, marches fifty miles in the night, invading Garh Khopur with Mr Wynyard, then Judge there, and the whole station, in an attempted breakout of prisoners (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). This episode depicts the general bravery of body, voluntary organisation as well as effective crowd control preceding any formal command.

Episode 2 (1517 June1857) Wynyard officially grants magisterial authority to Pepple and sends him to Bastillion with twenty troopers of the 12th Irregular Cavalry. The petition sums up the instructions of Wynyard in one sentence, viz.: I offered to accompany 20 troopers of the 12th Irregular Cavalry as a Deputy Magistrate to Basti... where Zemindars were looting and burning the villages (Home\* Dept., Public Letter No. 105). This framing is important and will be considered in more detail; the real orders were much more violent and clear.

Episode 3 (17 June 1857): He rescues Sergeant Busher from the rebel zamindar "Bully Sing" after two previous attempts by a Mr. Cook and Collector Paterson had failed, and facilitates Colonel Lennox and family's movement from concealment to safety at Captainganj (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105; Busher, qtd. in "Morning Chronicle" 30 Sept. 1857). This episode functions as the

heroic set-piece of the narrative: Peppé succeeds where others could not.

Episode 4 (3 July 1857): "I destroyed the large village of Mowah Dabur, where the Officers of the 22nd Native Infantry had been murdered, coming from Fyzabad, and recovered from the Raja of Nugger their property taken from them after being murdered" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). The episode is summarised in one sentence. Its brevity, as argued below, is rhetorical calculation.

Episode 5 (August 1857–January 1858): Peppé retreats with evacuating officials to Azamgarh, accompanies them to the battle of Gugha, goes to Calcutta at "my own expense" where his family has been sent, remains "in great distress, being out of funds, not having received any relief or assistance from any Relief Fund or from Government" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). This episode introduces the suffering motif that will become central to the confirmatio and peroratio.

Episode 6 (21 May 1858): "At 9 a.m. of the 21st May, I was attacked by a body of rebels, 1,000 strong. I had about the same number of my own tenantry, and fought them for upwards of half an hour; my people ... gave way, and I had to retire with only the clothes on my back. I lost five men killed" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). A more or less uniform picture can be outlined with the help of contemporary reports in the Bombay Times and the Journal of Commerce, as well as the Abstract Proceedings of the government of the week ending 23 May 1858 (Rizvi 222; "Goruckpore District" 380). They do recognize though that the number of insurgents and the names of the leaders are not well known.

Episode 7 (19 July2 September 1858): I was with Lieutenant Ayrton Pullan and Sikhs detachments; we had an engagement at Alidapur, when I was



knocked off my horse, and had a wound on the left hand. It was I who had told that my tenants had now turned out and slain 17 of the 28 slain that day, and that I had continued the field service, though wounded, until the 2nd inst. when I was relieved by the Assistant Magistrate, Mr. 9Wilson, then (Home Dept., Public Letter) No.105). This is supported separately by the Allen of 4 October 1858, Indian Mail, which writes that Mr. Peppé, who was in advance, is said to have crippled two or three of them before the approaching force brought them up; that he had received a minor cut with his sword (in the hand) ( “A Gallant Affair” 796).

## A Narrative Velocity of Violence and its Control.

The most prominent structural aspect of the narratio is that it is paced differently. Peppé devotes long space to episodes of personal initiative and heroism the march to Gorakhpur, the rescue of Busher, the skirmish at Alidapur, but he condenses, occasionally to one sentence, acts of violence which otherwise would have been rhetorically inconvenient. The burning of Mahua Dabar, an affair, as we are told by Wynyard, occupying several days, and involving the utter destruction of a large market town, with hundreds of inhabitants in it, is described in forty words. The conflagrations of Sansarpur and Tilja are also treated quite briefly.

This squeezing is not accidental. Until it consists in the version of plausible deniability of the narratio: the events described are not denied, they form the strongest part of his expertise in proving his usefulness, but they are told at a pace that does not allow the reader to focus on their magnitude or proportion to each other.

IV. Confirmatio: Evidence,  
Intertextuality, and Reframing  
Wynyard Orders.

I Beg to Forward Several Documents: The Architecture of Proof.

In classical confirmatio the speaker is supposed to produce evidence testes, tabulae, praesumptiones to support the asserts made in the narratio. The confirmatio given by Peppé is spread throughout the petition in two forms, internal corroboration, interwoven with the narratio itself, and an express promise of documentary evidence afterward in the closing line of the petition: I beg to send several documents proving my services (Home Dept., Public Letter im No.105). These papers, which were presumably copies of the commendatory letters of Wynyard, the reports of Peppé himself to Paterson, and perhaps the letter of Colonel Kelly admitting his help in the operations on the Nepal border are not extant in the copy of that file which is preserved, but the archival background confirms their existence. The internal confirmatio is achieved, first and foremost, by what can be described as intertextual anchoring: Peppé refers to letters, names of authorities, dates, reference to a dispatch made by Colonel Kelly, etc. in manners that indicate that his narrative could and should be verified by reference to official sources (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). This is an advanced play of rhetoric. By making the reader resort to external validation, he insinuously asserts the authority of an official document but not of an official.

## Reading Peppé Against Wynyard: Reframing the Orders

The brightest part of the confirmation is seen when the retrospective narrative of Peppé is read alongside the true correspondence of Wynyard which has been published in the Rizvi collection. Three specific correspondences deserve detailed analysis.

The order to go to Basti, 15 June 1857.



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

*Peppé writes: "On the 15th June, I volunteered to go with 20 troopers of the 12th Irregular Cavalry as a Deputy Magistrate to Bustee ... where numbers of the Zemindars were plundering and burning the villages" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105).*

Wynyard's actual letter of 15 June 1857 (No. 215) reads:

"You are hereby invested with powers of a Magistrate in this District till further notice ... I request that in the event of your finding any parties in the act of plundering you will direct the Cavalry to cut them up at once and to take no prisoners. Any opposition to your orders to be treated in the same way." (Rizvi 278–79)

The gap between these two versions is enormous. Peppé's summary erases the order to kill on sight and take no prisoners. The order Cut them up at once is a colourless concept like plundering and burning the villages, although it gives no clue that the mandate of the person was to carry out the summary execution of those who had indulged in such acts. The sentence "Give the Cav a cut at them at once that they may have no prisoners" is no euphemism, but a directive to kill them, not to take prisoners. Peppé's omission of it from his retrospective account is the single clearest example in the petition of how the confirmation works by selective quotation as much as by positive evidence.

The order to destroy Mahua Dabar, 15 June 1857.

Wynyard's same letter continues:

"From Bustee I wish you to proceed to Mhoueadabur ... taking with you all the available force from the Thana of Bustee, and the Theselee Thana and

Moonsiffée of Captaingunge together with a party of Bayldars and some gunpowder and utterly to burn and destroy that village.—

I hear in that Village that 5 of our countrymen were cruelly butchered in cold blood, and I shall be glad to hear that not one stone of it is left upon another. Of course you will be careful not to hurt anybody in the village, unless you are opposed." (Rizvi 278–79)

The phrase "not one stone of it is left upon another" is a biblical trope of total annihilation—an echo of Matthew 24:2 ("There shall not be left here one stone upon another")—deployed with no apparent irony. Wynyard's note "you will be careful not to hurt anybody in the village, unless you are opposed" is as thin a humanitarian qualification as it is possible to imagine: in practice, any village that did not flee before the arrival of cavalry and demolition teams would almost inevitably "oppose" by mere presence. Wynyard's subsequent letter of 20 June ("I was glad to see from your letter to Mr. Cooke that you were about to burn down Mhouea Dabur and shall be more glad to learn that it is an accomplished fact") and his letter of 4 July, acknowledging that "the destruction of the village of Mahooa Dabur, was progressing satisfactorily, but that it would take several days before all the houses are levelled to the ground" (Rizvi 279–80), confirm that the operation was extended, systematic, and celebrated at the administrative level. Peppé's petition renders all this as: "On the 3rd July, I destroyed the large village of Mowah Dabur, where the Officers of the 22nd Native Infantry had been murdered ... and recovered from the Raja of Nugger their property taken from them after being murdered" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105). "I destroyed" where Wynyard had



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

ordered; "where the Officers ... had been murdered" as the sole contextualising clause; no mention of Wynyard's extravagant biblical enthusiasm, no mention of the gunpowder and demolition parties, no mention of the duration. And the sentence is immediately followed by Wynyard's letter of 4 July—but only cited in general terms, not quoted. The reframing is near-total.

The order regarding pleaders, 17 June 1857. A third Wynyard letter, sent as a supplementary instruction on 17 June 1857 (No. 32), reads simply: "If any of the Pleaders of the Moonsiff's Cutchery are the least disobedient to his orders have the goodness to direct the Sowars to shoot them" (Rizvi 278). This is an order to shoot civilian lawyers for disobedience. It appears nowhere in Peppé's petition. Its absence is unsurprising but instructive: Peppé cites Wynyard's commendatory letters extensively and alludes to his general support, while omitting entirely those of Wynyard's instructions that, if quoted, would have exposed the operations to retrospective scrutiny. The impact created by such systematic omissions is to transform Peppé into an agent of state-approved destruction into a moral agent, at least in his own right, which shows that his discriminating moderation is as reflective of his moral judgment as his direct action. When Wynyard writes (23 June 1857), "I am quite satisfied that you exercised a sound discretion in not attempting to burn down Mhouea, which probably would have been followed by serious disaster" (Rizvi 281)—this refers to the fact that Peppé initially waited until he had sufficient force before attempting the burning—Peppé can, in his petition, present this as evidence of his measured character, without acknowledging that what he was judicious about was the timing of a village destruction operation rather than its desirability.

## The Confirmatio and Competing Claimants

The petition's second major confirmatio move targets Indian loyalists who have, in Peppé's account, received disproportionate rewards. He writes:

"I do so the more especially when I hear of the honors and rewards heaped on Natives who have turned at the eleventh hour, and called themselves faithful to Government. I was here at the commencement of the rebellion, and came into it again on re-occupation. I have served Government faithfully without wages, and exposed myself on Government account to the risk of my life, unaided by Government troops. I feel the neglect I suffer under the more when I have seen others coming into the district, and only the other day receiving full emoluments, and when they did go before the enemy were always sheltered by European troops—such men have received Jagheers, swords of honor, khilluts, &c." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

The phrase "turned at the eleventh hour" is a New Testament echo (Matthew 20:9) that reverses the parable's moral: in the original, those who arrive late receive equal payment as an act of divine generosity; here, Peppé insists that late loyalty should not earn the same reward as early risk. The title of Native which is adopted by the author is admittedly anonymous; but a close inspection of the Basti Gazetteer and the chronicle of the district of Alexander allow of a rough conjecture. Mahipat Singh, a Gautam Rajput, was granted land worth Rs. 3,000 in revenue which was supposedly a reward to his service in defending the



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

Ghagra ferries in Nagar and the capture of the Mahua Dabar murderers (Nevill 163). Likewise, the Bansi ruler was the recipient of confiscated estates of the former rebel raja of Nagar (Alexander 676).

In the eyes of the colonial government, such grants were genuine donations to the peace in the country; in the judgment of Peppé himself, however, they were late, and in the main self-serving, and unfairly generous compared with the responsibilities--and the loss--which his own previous, more active, and unsustainable service fulfilled. The unspoken racial stratification within the wording of Natives who have turned at the eleventh hour is especially questionable. Peppé does not oppose to justifiable reward of Indians; but he argues that his own previous, more perilous, more protracted, and entirely unrecompensed service should have a superseding position in the patronage ladder. Such argument is a perfect example of a very settler-colonial logic, in which the presence and initiative of Europeans, in any form, whether formally permitted or not, is already a *prima facie*, or thus *prima facie*, claim.

## V. Peroratio: Grievance, Apostrophe, and the Bid for Imperial Memory

### The Emotional Turn

Classical peroratio had two recognised functions: enumeratio, a summary recapitulation of the argument, and conquestio combined with indignatio, the arousal of the audience's pity and outrage on behalf of the speaker (Cicero 2.77.311–78.313). Peppé's peroratio deploys both in succession. The recapitulation begins:

"My Lord, I am a private and humble individual; when called on by Government to aid and assist it by Government servants, I readily came forward with men to keep order in 1857. I then

assisted laying in Commissariat matters to keep the Goorkha Army when no Civilian knowing the district could get the articles of food required by that Army." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

The anaphoric sequence that follows is the petition's literary climax:

"I have served Government as an Honorary Magistrate, receiving no emoluments. I have fought the rebels with my own tenantry, when I was refused assistance with Government troops. I have exposed my person to danger, neglected the calls of a wife and family when Government called on me. I have been knocked off my horse by rebels, and very nearly lost my life, having been wounded, though happily slightly (it might have turned out otherwise). My house has been burned and plundered several times. Again, on the 12th June, 1859, I was attacked by 50 Sepoys, and had to escape with nothing but my life, my property in horses and money having been lost to me." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

The "I have ... I have ... I have," seven times repeated, is an example of a formal figure of rhetoric as anaphora and asyndeton combined to create the impression of a sworn deposition. The first clause adds to the cumulative impact of sacrifice, one after the other: the lack of pay, the lack of external assistance in combat, personal danger, neglect of family, physical injury and material devastation. The flashing irony of the confirmation is the parenthetical comment, though happily slightly (it might have been otherwise), a comment that reveals the gratitude that the speaker feels towards



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

his survival and at the same time forces the audience to understand exactly how close the other option came to destruction, ensuring that they are aware that the situation would have happened otherwise.

The conquestio gradually turns into indignatio exactly the outward manifestation of the outrage at the injustice ones are looking at when compared with the reward given to other people. This dramatic monologue shift shows how one must make personal sacrifices not to be recognized externally, which further underlines the inequity of the system that the speaker describes:

"I feel the neglect I suffer under the more when I have seen others coming into the district, and only the other day receiving full emoluments, and when they did go before the enemy were always sheltered by European troops—such men have received Jagheers, swords of honor, khilluts, &c." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

The opposition is created in the form of a chiasmus: the contemporaries were paid in service and then were honoured, and Peppy was neither paid nor honoured in service or afterwards. When Peppo was seventeen years old, his colleagues took shelter under the tutelage of the European military armies, he was fighting armed with tenant farmers and sometimes had crude weaponry like sticks. The conceptualization of a conception of injured merit seems to be the underpinning of the affective rationale.

## The Patriotic Apostrophe

The peroratio's final movement ascends from personal grievance to patriotic apostrophe:

"My Lord, I have served your Government, I have served my

country, and my Queen." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

The aphoristic three, Government, country, Queen, is the most literary clause of the petition. It is also a tricolon crescens; every term that follows and follows is larger and more abstract, following the line of the close connection with the administration that Canning was part of, to the larger concept of the nation, and finally to the ultimate sovereign person of Queen Victoria, to whom the 1858 Proclamation was addressed. By identifying himself with the three of Government, country and Queen, Peppe claims an identity that goes beyond the privileged Indian elite to include all the loyal British subjects.

The terminal sentences continue with this progression of the symbolic capital, not forgetting to carefully maintain the pretense of modesty:

"I may have equally deserved honors and rewards with those who have received them. If I deserve them, I may safely trust my claim with your Lordship. I have laid my simple story before you, hoping for your consideration to it. My worldly means, my Lord, are not such as to make me despise anything like what many others have received from the hands of Government in this district. All I ask is to place my services and their's comparatively in juxta position, and if I deserve a reward, I ask it from your Excellency." (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105)

"I may have equally deserved" is a careful hedge: it is not a direct claim but an invitation to Canning to make the comparison and arrive at the same conclusion. The phrase "I may safely trust my claim with your Lordship" transfers



the burden of judgment upward, flattering Canning as the one person of sufficient wisdom and authority to assess what the bureaucracy has failed to see. "My simple story" echoes the exordium's "humble individual": the fiction of artlessness maintained even as the petition demonstrates, in every sentence, a rhetorician's control of register, affect, and structure.

## VI. Settler-Colonial Subjectivity and the Idiom of the Frontier Lord

### Birdpore as the Source of Authority

The rhetorical strength of Peppé in the petition is based not only on his activities in the rebel uprising of 1857-58 but a system of infrastructures that he had carefully planned in the previous decade. According to the Basti Gazetteer, the estate of Birdpore passed to its present state of a carefully cultivated farm-land, which had been 29,316 acres of swamp and jungle, originally made over to Gibbon and Cock in the 1830s. The transplanted rice, together with the building of earthen dams, diversion channels and irrigation canals, led to an elaborate hydrological network that extended more than 185 miles by 1870s. This infrastructure facilitated a growth of demographics of 7,500 in 1847 to 17,500 in 1872 (Nevill 98, 40, 48; Alexander 761). In an article on his irrigation works in 1874, Peppé himself is quoted: I believe I saved about 15,000 beegahs of rice that season... in a week... and with 600 to 1,000 of the villagers, and none of them assisted by the Government or the P. W. Department ("Mr. Peppe and his Irrigation Works 49). The rhetoric of this is foreshadowed in the petition so to speak: action that lacks the institutional support, mobilisation of the rural constituents on a voluntary basis and results that will replace the role of government. Even though the petition does not provide a comprehensive account of development, it is based on this historical account. In saying, when he is

fighting, that he fought with my own tenantry, and that at the evacuation of Goruckpore my tenantry defended my property more than three months, and that on two occasions they drove back several of the rebels (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105), he is playing off the allegiance which, in his case, he brought about by his agrarian results. In this way, the tenants of Birdpore fought on his behalf since they were beneficiaries of his development shaping a two-way patronage that was eventually put to the test and confirmed during the 1857-58 crisis. This paternalist self-image is at once a genuine description of what settler-estate development meant for cultivators and a rhetorical construction. The Basti Gazetteer notes that Peppé attracted cultivators from Oudh who were "only too glad to be able to escape from the misrule of that province" (Nevill 98)—a formulation that naturalises colonial land settlement as humanitarian rescue rather than labour recruitment for commercial agriculture. Peppé's petition reproduces this logic: his tenants are loyal because he is a good landlord; British order works where Indian orders fail.

### Non-Official Europeans and the Competition for Recognition

The petition's specific competitive environment—defined by the presence of Dunne's parallel claim in the same file and by the numerous Indian loyalty awards that Peppé resents—illuminates the structural position of settler-colonial claimants in post-1857 India. Non-official Europeans in positions like Peppé's—forest grantees, indigo planters, opium agents, estate managers—occupied an ambiguous space between the imperial state and its Indian subjects. They were British subjects with access to official communication networks; they were private individuals without salary or guaranteed authority; and they were local actors with coercive resources—armed



tenantry, private intelligence networks, access to food stores and transport—that the state sometimes desperately needed. The 1859 petition is a demand that this ambiguity be resolved in Peppé's favour. He asks not merely for land or money but for recognition of a subject position: that of the loyal, capable, self-sufficient European who fills the gaps left by an overwhelmed colonial state. In asking Canning to "place my services and their's comparatively in juxta position" (Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105), he is asking for a formal ranking within the imperial economy of merit—a ranking that, he believes, would place him above both tardy Indian loyalists and sheltered official newcomers.

## VII. Conclusion: Rhetoric, Violence, and Colonial Memory

The petition of 22 June 1859 by Peppé is a graphic example of the subtleties of power, summarizing the power of defining own behavior, of presenting the evidence proposed to the Governor-General, and of defining what expressions of loyalty will be considered to be honest and those instrumental. Its rhetorical sophistication lies less in any single purple passage than in its systematic control of what is said at speed and what is said at length, what is quoted from official corroborators and what is omitted from the same sources. The widest gap in that system is the distance between Wynyard's letters and Peppé's summary of the same operations. Where Wynyard orders Peppé to proceed "with ... some gunpowder and utterly to burn and destroy that village" and declares that he will "be glad to hear that not one stone of it is left upon another" (Rizvi 278–79), Peppé writes that he "destroyed the large village of Mowah Dabur." Where Wynyard orders that parties caught plundering be "cut up at once" with "no prisoners taken" (Rizvi 278), Peppé notes that he proceeded to "put a stop to the

plundering." The transformation of frontier counter-insurgency—with its summary killings, punitive demolitions, and extra-legal orders—into the neutral vocabulary of "destroying," "dispersing," and "fighting" is the narratio's central literary act. The exordium's performed humility, the narratio's strategic pacing, the confirmatio's selective quotation, and the peroratio's patriotic apostrophe together constitute a coherent rhetorical programme: to make a private landholder's violent local initiative legible to the highest authority in India as honourable, loyal, and deserving service. The fact that Peppé appears to have received his land award eventually—the archival note in the Home Department file indicates that the complications around the Tegra valuation were in process of resolution—suggests that the programme was, in its immediate practical purpose, successful. Yet the petition's literary significance reaches beyond its immediate occasion. As a specimen of the settler-colonial reward claim, it illuminates a cultural position that is easily lost between the documented worlds of official administrators and Indian subjects: the world of the European who is neither agent of empire nor its passive beneficiary but its violent, entrepreneurial, and resentful instrument. When analyzing the language in which Peppé states that, "My Lord, I have served your Government, I have served my country, and my Queen", he is attempting to position himself in the imperial memory in his own way. This critique has been a close reading of the rhetorics structure of this proposition, focusing on its ordering, the purposeful silence, and on its repositioning, to demonstrate not only what the colonial past had posed itself as recording but also upon the specificities of this recording that had been so carefully crafted to obscure the delicate truths.



# Janak: A Journal of Humanities

“An International, Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Journal”

(ISSN: 3 1 1 7 - 3 4 6 2 ) Volume: 02, Issue: 01, March, 2026

Available on <https://janakajournal.in/index.php/1/about>

## Works Cited

1. "A Gallant Affair." Allen's Indian Mail and Register of Intelligence for British and Foreign India, China, and All Parts of the East, 4 Oct. 1858, p. 796.
2. Alexander, E., et al. Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the Gorakhpur District. Allahabad, North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1880.
3. Annals of Indian Administration. Vol. 3, Serampore, 1858, p. 295.
4. "Atrocities at Goruckpore." Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce, 19 June 1858, p. 380.
5. Busher, Sergeant R. Statement. Morning Chronicle [London], 30 Sept. 1857, p. 3.
6. Cicero, Marcus Tullius. De Inventione. Translated by H. M. Hubbell, Harvard UP, 1949.
7. "GHAZEEPORE, October 17, 1857." Inverness Courier, 3 Dec. 1857, p. 7.
8. Government of India, Home Department. Public Letter No. 105 of 1859: Petitions of M. P. Dunne and W. Peppé; Minutes of the Home Department Public Consultation of 16 September 1859. National Archives of India, New Delhi. [Cited parenthetically as Home Dept., Public Letter No. 105.]
9. "Goruckpore District." Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce, 19 June 1858, p. 380. [Extract from Bengal Catholic Herald, 27 May 1858.]
10. "THE MUTINY AT FYZABAD: Narrative of Colonel Lennox." Morning Chronicle [London], 30 Sept. 1857, p. 3.
11. "Mr. Peppe's Irrigation Works." The Pioneer [Allahabad], 8 May 1874, p. 3.
12. "A MUTINEER'S FATE." The Homeward Mail from India, China and the East, 27 Mar. 1871, p. 379.
13. Nevill, H. R. Basti: A Gazetteer. District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, vol. 34, Allahabad, Government Press, 1907.
14. Peppe Family Memorial Stone. St Peter's Cemetery, Aberdeen, Scotland. Transcribed in Bradbury, David. "The Peppés of Birdpore, U.P." Missed History, 2020, [pastpresented.info](http://pastpresented.info).
15. Rizvi, S. A. A., editor. Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh: Source-Material. Vol. 4, Lucknow, Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1959.
16. "Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the Basti District." In Statistical Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces of India, vol. 6, edited by Edwin T. Atkinson, Allahabad, Government Press, 1881, pp. 683–90, 788–89.
17. Wingfield, C. J. Letter to William Muir, Secretary to Government, North-Western Provinces. 5 July 1858. Letter No. 196 of 1858. In Rizvi, Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, vol. 4, pp. 251–53.
18. Wynyard, W. Letters to W. Peppé. 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 29 June and 4 July 1857. Nos. 215, 32, 61, 69, 84, 104, 118. In Rizvi, Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, vol. 4, pp. 277–83.